Around the World With Burton Holmes

Two Weeks on the China Sea

By Burton Holmes
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Japanese Junk—The Kind of Craft That Will Soon be Seen No More in Eastern Waters

FROM Japan to Java is an interesting jaunt. To see all the interesting sights in all the ports at which we touch en route would take ten times as much time as the two weeks which we spent last June in the China Sea. To tell of all the interesting things we did see in two weeks would be to write voluminously of Japan, China, the Straits Settlements, Sumatra and Java, and to write a treatise on shipboard life under two flags, American and Dutch. Therefore it is wiser in trying to describe this voyage in a few hundred words to tell simply of what happened to us during the particular two weeks in question. The start from Japan for Java was made on a lucky Friday from the most beautiful place in Japan, Miyajima, the Sacred Island of the Inland Sea—one of the "San Kei" celebrated in Japanese poetry and history as the "Three Great Scenic Sights." After spending many weeks in many variously-beautiful places in Japan, including the two companion beauty-spots: Matsushima, the fairyland archipelago of pine-clad islets, near Sendai, in the north, and Ama-no-Hashidate, the "Bridge of Heaven," a pine-clad sand-spit closing an inner bay on the west coast, we had come to Miyajima, the "Island of the Shrine," to find it the most lovely place in a land celebrated for its scenic loveliness.

A LITTLE sampan—all small boats in Japan are "sampans" to the foreigner—took us from Miyajima to the railway station on the shore of the Main Island of Japan. We outsiders call it the Main Island, because it has no name; all other divisions of the Japanese archipelago have special names, but Japan itself, the largest island, upon which are situate most of the important cities, Yokohama, Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto and Kobé, has no special name. Westward, along its south coast, always in view of the Inland Sea, we are rushed by rail to the port of Shimonoseki, crossing at dusk in a small steam ferryboat to Moji, the busy little port at the north end of Kyushu, the southernmost of the large islands.

Then across Kyushu we ride all night by rail toward Nagasaki. We knew there were no sleeping-cars in Kyushu, but we hoped to sleep, expecting, of course, to find the first-class compartment unoccupied save by our own tired selves. As the seats of first-class cars are arranged like those of ordinary American street cars—long, upholstered benches up and down the sides of the cars—they afford comfortable sleeping space—provided that the space is free. We are the first to deposit our rugs and baskets in the one and only first-class car, but close upon our heels come twenty-seven other passengers, all Japanese, all holding first-class tickets, each the possessor of more rugs and baskets. There is just room for all, provided we sit bolt upright and pile our possessions on the racks above. Most "foreigners" under similar circumstances sit all night bolt upright like subway passengers in a crowded train. But the Japanese do nothing of the kind: they simply shake off their wooden "*geta*" or sandals, climb up on the seats, turn their backs to the aisle, kneel down, doubling their legs under them, and then, leaning forward, rest their heads against the window frames and doze off as serenely as if they were in their own beds. We took advantage of this custom—which, of course, leaves the floor of the car free—to unroll "*futons*" or Japanese beds—cheap, wadded quilts, purchased at the last moment—spread them flat on the floor, and on them lay us down to sleep the sleep of the stiff-jointed foreigner who cannot, like the Japanese, be simultaneously an immobile contortionist and a successful sleeper.

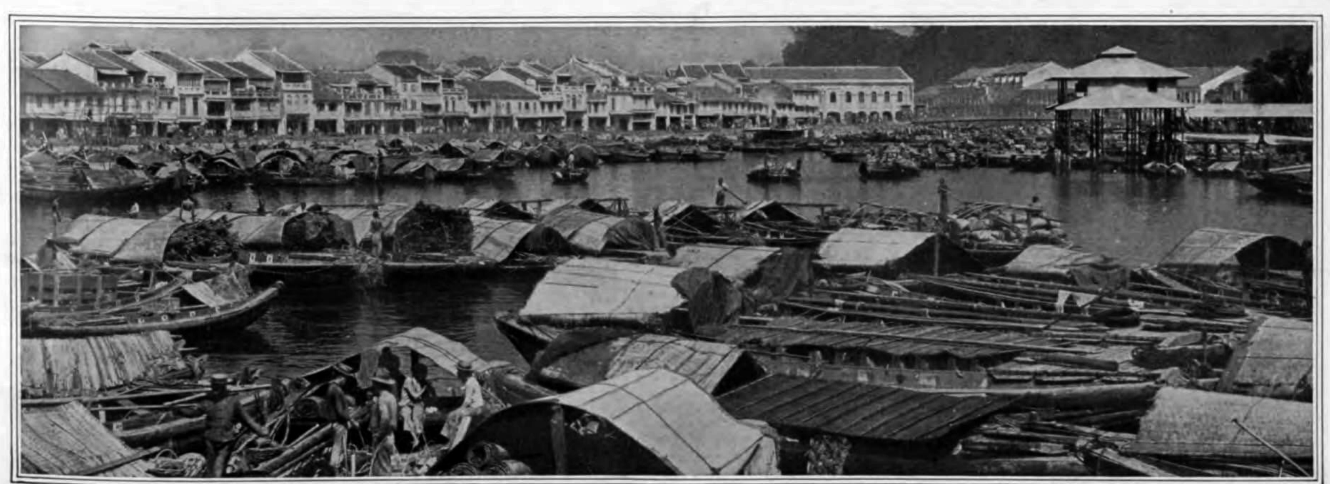
Sunrise over Nagasaki's lovely harbor was ample recompense for the discomforts of the night; but as we feasted our eyes upon the spectacle we were amazed to see our ship, the "Korea," already in port and flying the "blue peter" in signal of departure. We had hoped to spend two days in Nagasaki, but of late the trans-Pacific liners have been saving a day somewhere in mid-ocean, and travelers who rely upon the printed schedules are liable to miss connections at the Japanese ports, as we nearly missed it there at Nagasaki. As we came alongside we could study in detail that marvelous operation of coaling ship as done in this port, more easily and expeditiously than at any other port in all the world. Neat, cleverly-adaptable scaffoldings are rigged along both sides of the hull, forming a series of ascending steps or terraces on which the coal-passers—men, women and children—are massed in vertical, double lines. Below are the grimy coal-barges, swarming with grimy, black-faced brown people who fill little baskets with the soft and sometimes powdery coal, hand each to the passers on the lowest tiers of the terraces, and they, with vigorous uplift of arms, start the basket on its upward flight. I say flight, because once started it seems to fly from hand to hand; the passers on the higher tiers seeming merely to touch it or guide it as it soars from the barge below to the coal-hole high up on the ship's side. Of course each soiled and dingy little worker gives the basket a boost, but so skillfully that the work looks effortless, and so cheerfully that this lowest, worst-paid kind of toil becomes a merry pastime, so lightly and so good-naturedly do the blackened little brownies discharge their heavy task.

ONCE outside of Nagasaki Harbor we are in the China Sea, and we resume the routine of the same shipboard existence that we enjoyed while crossing the Pacific, months before, on the same ship, which meantime has been to San Francisco and returned. Among the incidents that varied the pleasant monotony of our crossing was one the like of which I never saw before. You know the little lookout platform high on the foremast, called the "crow's nest," usually occupied by a lone sailor, who during his long watch scans the horizon for the sail so rarely seen. Every male passenger doubtless has had an idea that he would like to spend an hour in the "crow's nest," but its dizzy situation, the "skeery-looking" ladder of rigging and the demoralizing swaying of that high-hung perch, inevitably discourage the attempt. So our "crow's nest" remained inviolate so far as the passengers were concerned until one memorable day when two adventurous American girls insisted—not in bravado, but simply "because"—on calling on the lookout in the nest. Up went one of them, the Captain a close second; down came the Captain and soon another Gibson figure was silhouetted against the sky, again with the Captain in attendance. What the lookout thought about it we don't know. How many snap-shots were taken by the other passengers never will be known—the descent was even cinematographed from the top of the pilot-house, and the English passengers on several occasions were heard to remark "Just fancy!" while the Americans were delighted with the courage and coolness displayed in the accomplishing of what was in many ways a daring achievement, and, to the heroines themselves, a unique and exhilarating one.



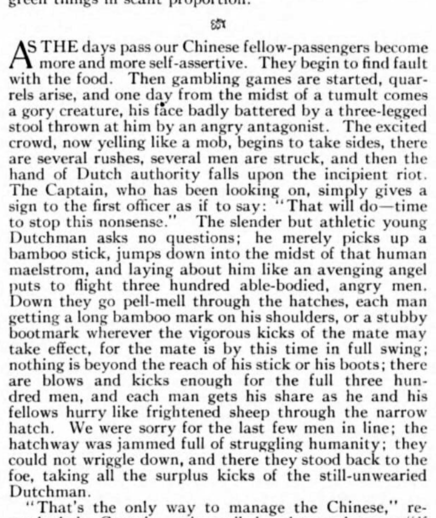
The Children of a Chinese Millionaire in Singapore

Others who interest us are the little Chinese girls, children of a Chinese consul returning to his native land. His boys wear what we may call modified "Melican" clothes, but the girls, like their mother, are not allowed to follow foreign fashions. And it is well that the women of the East should



"Singapore—That Most Interesting Port, Practically a Chinese City"

not ape all the ways of the women of the West. Much they may learn from their American sisters, but how to dress comfortably, sensibly, durably and economically, and at the same time elegantly, is an art in which the Oriental is centuries ahead of our young and wasteful civilization. But being a mere man the writer hesitates to go deeper into the question.


The Adventurous American Girl Coming Down From the "Crow's Nest"

We get our first glimpse of China at Shanghai, and here we spend a day ashore. There are two cities at Shanghai: the native city, a little walled-in marvel of comfortless compactness; and the foreign city with its modern buildings, five and six stories high, its broad, smooth streets, its trolley cars, its clubs, its race-tracks and polo grounds. This is the Paris of the Orient, where, as a young American resident remarked, "a man can go to ruination quicker than anywhere else in the wide world. Life in modern Shanghai," he said, "has all the rush and tenseness of downtown life in New York; it has the *savoir-faire* of London and the 'I don't care' of Paris, with an added Oriental something that seems to mean, 'Why should I care?'"

Yet I cannot believe that Shanghai is as careless as she pretends to be. We see too many evidences of the good will, good sense and good work of the foreign community of this enterprising outpost of European civilization in the East. This Shanghai is no Chinese city; it is a European town with American affiliations, set down on the banks of an affluent of the Yangtse River, next door to a little old Chinese city that is as utterly Chinese as if


"Chow Time" in the Chinese Steerage

its denizens had never left its narrow, dirty confines to wonder at the broad magnificences of the alien city that has dropped down just outside its cramped and crumbling little gates.

Three days later we have landed at Hongkong, the terminal port for most of the trans-Pacific steamship lines. There we leave our American liner and there we hope to find a ship to carry us direct to Java. Hongkong is one of the greatest seaports of the world. It has once, a few years since, even held first place, surpassing London and New York in the volume of its shipping. The island of Hongkong belongs absolutely to England, ceded to her by China in 1842. It was then a barren, rocky island inhabited by a few poor fishermen.


The Boys May Become "Melican" Boys, but the Little Girls Must Remain Chinese

It is today a verdurous Gibraltar, strong as a rocky fortress and beautiful as a mountain Eden rising from the sea. The city, which is called not Hongkong but Victoria, is a city of some three hundred thousand souls, chiefly Chinese, of course, for the Chinese have flocked to the city of Victoria to enjoy the benefits of British trade and British justice. Ships from all corners of the world are seen in Hongkong Harbor, and among them we find the ship that we are seeking, a Dutch liner bound for Java, sailing on the morrow for the port of Samarang via Muntok on Banca Island off Sumatra. The voyage, they tell us, will occupy eight days.

THERE are accommodations for just four cabin passengers, our two selves and two Japanese sugar-experts from Formosa, sent by their government to study the sugar industry of Java. Both speak a little English —very little and very quaint their English is; but that does not discourage the one from studying Dutch with the aid of an English-Dutch grammar, nor the other from attempting to learn the Malay language with the aid of a phrase-book intended only for the use of Englishmen. Imagine studying two foreign tongues through the medium of a third foreign tongue not yet half understood! But day after day, for eight long days, those two industrious servants of His Imperial Japanese Majesty's Government devoted eight hours daily to their tasks. They never took their eyes from the pages of the textbooks, except to close their eyes while they grunted Dutch phrases, or murmured Malay salutations to themselves. Japan is fortunate in the possession of public servants who, even when far from the official eye of their department, will conscientiously devote eight hours a day to self-imposed tasks, apparently so hopeless.

Our steamer carries a steerage list of about three hundred Chinese coolies bound for the tin mines of Banca Island, one of the richest tin deposits of the East. They are a low-browed, ignorant, simple lot of human animals, young, strong and active; they appeared timid as whipped dogs in the presence of the medical inspectors who examined them and turned back a few sick ones just before we sailed. But once on the high sea they became like happy cats and stretched themselves out on the sunny decks to slumber on their neat, straw mats during the long hours between their simple meals. Their "*chow*" consists of boiled rice in huge quantities, and dried fish and green things in scant proportion.

AS THE days pass our Chinese fellow-passengers become more and more self-assertive. They begin to find fault with the food. Then gambling games are started, quarrels arise, and one day from the midst of a tumult comes a gory creature, his face badly battered by a three-legged stool thrown at him by an angry antagonist. The excited crowd, now yelling like a mob, begins to take sides, there are several rushes, several men are struck, and then the hand of Dutch authority falls upon the incipient riot. The Captain, who has been looking on, simply gives a sign to the first officer as if to say: "That will do—time to stop this nonsense." The slender but athletic young Dutchman asks no questions; he merely picks up a bamboo stick, jumps down into the midst of that human maelstrom, and laying about him like an avenging angel puts to flight three hundred able-bodied, angry men. Down they go pell-mell through the hatches, each man getting a long bamboo mark on his shoulders, or a stubby bootmark wherever the vigorous kicks of the mate may take effect, for the mate is by this time in full swing; nothing is beyond the reach of his stick or his boots; there are blows and kicks enough for the full three hundred men, and each man gets his share as he and his fellows hurry like frightened sheep through the narrow hatch. We were sorry for the last few men in line; the hatchway was jammed full of struggling humanity; they could not wriggle down, and there they stood back to the foe, taking all the surplus kicks of the still-unwearied Dutchman.

"That's the only way to manage the Chinese," remarked the Captain, as he smiled and turned away; "if we didn't do that now and then they might think they owned the ship. You see, there are only eight of us, counting the engineers, and sometimes we have as many as fifteen hundred pigtails in the steerage."

Meantime we have been nearing the Equator. The weather has been fine, balmy, not too hot, and we have witnessed several most impressive tropic rainfalls, tons of tepid water descending on the ship as if poured out of heavenly spouts; then suddenly bright sunshine dries the dripping ship and on we go across a smooth, intensely-blue and lovely sea. We crossed the line on Friday, the twelfth of June, at 10:35 A. M. It was the coolest and the dullest morning of the voyage, the only day that we felt like wearing clothes. We spent the other days clad only in Japanese kimono of silk crêpe, with straw sandals on our otherwise bare feet. Thus arrayed we were perfectly comfortable, and we looked with pity on our Japanese fellow-travelers who, like all official Japanese, are devoted to foreign ways, for they wore starched shirts and collars, coats and trousers, and the heavy, ugly, leather shoes and other unnecessary and uncomfortable things prescribed by Western civilization. The Dutch Captain was much amused over the contradictory make-ups of his Occidental and his Oriental cabin passengers.

WE DID not touch at Singapore on the way down to Java, but on the return trip we spent three days in that most interesting port, where England has provided another asylum of opportunity for the Chinese. Singapore is practically a Chinese city, under English rule, on an island off the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula. In aspect the city is semi-European, semi-Oriental. In the streets we see people of many races, but the Chinese always in the majority. At the driving hour we see a splendid show of smart equipages, but the smartest traps, the finest horses, are those of the rich Chinese, owners of tin mines, speculators in the products of the neighboring Malay States. The nearest of those States is the Principality or Sultanate of Johore, ruled over by His Highness


The Tennis Club in the Singapore of Today

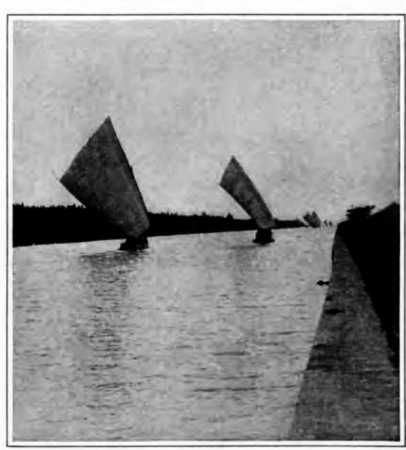
Sultan Ibrahim, the most up-to-date Sultan of the Far East. It had been my privilege to meet His Highness several years before on board a Calais-Dover Channel steamer, and there I had basked in the sunshine of his smile, the most brilliant, sparkling smile that ever illuminated a dusky Eastern face, for Sultan Ibrahim wears a huge solitaire diamond set full in the front wall of each of his pearly-white and perfectly-formed front teeth! When he opens that wondrous cave of brilliants and lets us look past its gleaming portals we gasp with astonishment, even if we do not sigh with envy. I saw my diamond-studded potentate many a time driving in Hyde Park or supping at the Savoy in London, and again I saw him at home in his little Johore capital, where he whiles


His Highness the Sultan of Johore—The Prince Who Wears Big Solitaires Set in His Front Teeth

away the heavy hours running the only racing automobile in his State, or entering his horses for the annual races held in Singapore.

Meantime our Dutch craft has touched at Banca Island, landed the Chinese coolies for the mines, and transferred us to another ship, which, skirting the long, low Sumatran coast, sails directly to the chief port of Java, Tandjong Priok, the new port of the capital, Batavia, where we begin our first visit to the Eden of the Dutch East Indies, of the charm of which I shall try to give an idea in THE JOURNAL next month.

NOTE—The next in this series of travel articles which Burton Holmes is writing for The Journal will appear in the February number, and will describe "Java: the Eden of Netherlands India."


The Entrance to the Old Port of Batavia, the Capital of Java